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AUTHOR Connors, Kathleen
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ABSTRACT

This article argues that QUE-deletion in Montreal French is a syntactic rule, rather than a phonological one, as earlier treatments had claimed. It is divided into five sections: (1) a discussion of why the rule accounting for the alternation of QUE with zero is a deletion, not an insertion rule, (2) a critique of the best known earlier (phonological) accounts of the rule, (3) a proposed lexico-syntactic solution, (4) an argument for the syntactic nature of the rule on the basis of its ordering among related rules, and (5) a limited survey of QUE-deletion in other popular dialects, with a view to finding indirect evidence as to its phonological or syntactic nature in Montreal French. This external evidence supports neither the phonological nor the syntactic solution conclusively. (Author)

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Deletion of QUE in Montreal French - a syntactic rule[1]

The deletion of the complementizer and relative pronoun QUE in Montreal French has been discussed in a number of recent papers, of which the most widely known is perhaps Cedergren and D. Sankoff (1974). I will cite their example (p.347):

(1) Au début je pense Ø ça a été plutôt un snobisme

and an example of relative QUE deletion:

(2) des livres Ø je vous parlais

(QUE replaces dont in popular French in Montreal and elsewhere.)

I. Why QUE deletion:

It should first of all be explained why complementizer and relative QUE should be described as deletable, and not insertable. There are conjunctions in Montreal French (as well as in other dialects) which end in an obligatory QUE: avant que, après que, pour que, sans que. QUE is always present in these forms. Moreover, in Standard French the conjunctive and relative QUE are always present:

(3) J'ai dit que j'allais le faire

(4) Les livres que j'ai empruntés

If QUE were (sometimes) inserted in non-Standard dialects like popular Montreal French, the process would look linguistically haphazard and would manifest hypercorrection. Indeed, if one starts with the hypothesis that QUE is optionally inserted in this dialect, one cannot find a general phonological or syntactic environment

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motivating that insertion, though there seems to be no reason to suspect hypercorrection. Consider the variety of environments which contain QUE, represented by the following examples from the Sankoff-Cedergren corpus[2] of Montreal French:

(5) /V _ V: ..., fait qu'elle m'l'a donné

/V _ C: Imagine pas que ces gars-là ils... ils doivent pas avoir été battus en hérode

/C _ V: Parce qu'avant c'était une école, ça

/C _ C: Je me rappelle que maman allait chercher ses commandes...

/Noun _ possessive adj: Il va jouer à la même place que son père il a joué, dans le champ

/Conjunction _ cardinal no: Probablement, parce que trois quatre fois j'ai parti pour aller...

/Verb _ demonstrative pronoun: Je sais que c'est à Montréal Est.

/Adj _ Art: vrai que le gars...

Researchers who have seen the presence or absence of QUE as phonologically determined have usually seen the process as deletion[3], relating it (at least implicitly) to the /ə/ deletion which accounts for QUE reduction in all dialects of French.

(6) /kə/ → [k] / ___ #V

QUE

(7) E.g.: Je pense qu'il est venu.

[k]

Some investigators have seen the output of (6) as part of the input to a rule like (8):

(8) /k/ → Ø

QUE

(9) E.g.: Je pense Ø il est venu.

With the provisos that /kə/ can also reduce between consonants:

(10) /kə/ → /k/ / C# __ #C

QUE

(11) E.g.: Je pense [k] c'est dommage

and that it is in this environment that the lone /k/ is then more likely to drop out:

(12) /k/ → Ø / C# __ #C

QUE

(13) E.g.: Je pense Ø c'est dommage.

(G. Sankoff, Sarrasin, and Cedergren 1971:4.)

Two of the rules Bickerton (1973:39) formulates for QUE deletion make it an alternative to Standard [ə] deletion before vowels:

(14)

$$que \rightarrow \emptyset \quad \begin{pmatrix} +cor \\ +strid \\ -syll \end{pmatrix} ___ (+syll)$$

and

(15) que → Ø / (+syll) ___ (+syll)

Bickerton adds, however, that these rules are "conjectural".

In relating non-Standard to Standard dialects, there is a natural bias in favour of deletion rules. Forms which are always present in the Standard dialect are often optionally (i.e., variably) absent in

the non-Standard dialect. This leads to positing deletion rather than insertion rules. Otherwise one would have to insert all instances of the form in the Standard dialect plus some in the non-Standard dialect, rather than just deleting some forms in the non-Standard dialect.

II. The Cedergren-Sankoff rule:

Cedergren and D. Sankoff's phonological account of QUE deletion restricts itself to the complementizer QUE. It is based on the performance of sixteen Montreal French speakers of both sexes and two social classes. The data summarized in their Table 5, reproduced[4] below (Cedergren and D. Sankoff:348) consists of the number of times QUE was present over the number of times it "should" have been present in the first half hour of taped interviews with these informants. The authors formulated the following variable rule on the basis of this data (p.348):

(16) que → <Ø> / $\left\langle \begin{bmatrix} [+sib] \\ +cns \\ -sib \end{bmatrix} \right\rangle$ ## $\begin{bmatrix} ____ \\ +comp \end{bmatrix}$ ## $\left\langle \begin{bmatrix} [+sib] \\ +cns \\ -sib \end{bmatrix} \right\rangle$

where [+sib] = [+cor, +ant, -son]

Table 5 should be inserted here

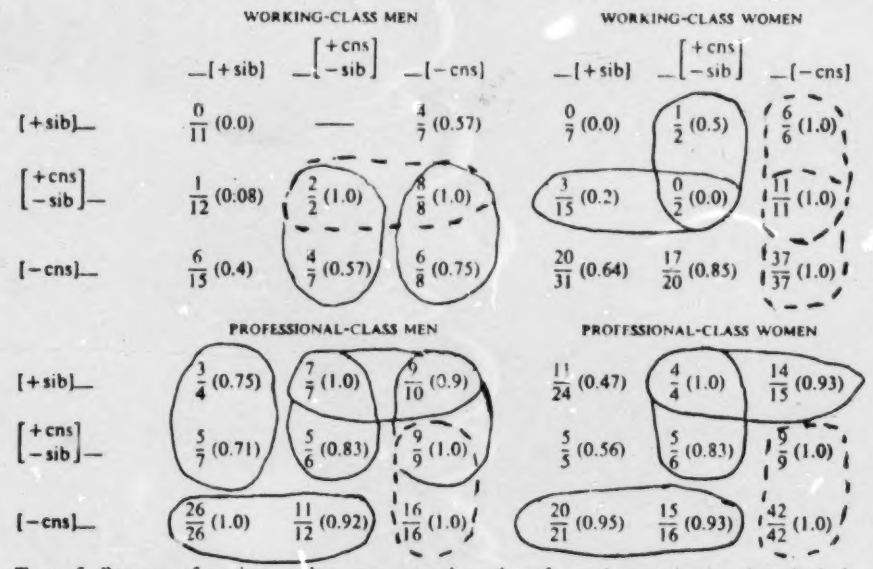

TABLE 5. Presence of *que* in complement over total number of complements in nine phonological environments, for four speakers in each category. Relative frequencies in parentheses.

What is important for this discussion is the relation among the nine environments mentioned in this rule. Given the conventions for stating variable rules, [+sib], $\begin{bmatrix}+\text{cns}\\-\text{sib}\end{bmatrix}$, and [-cns], in that order, are decreasingly favourable environments for complementizer QUE deletion, on either side of the deletable QUE. Thus, in Table 5, rule (16) predicts that percentages of QUE presence should increase from left to right and from top to bottom in each of the four sub-tables. The oval lines which I have superimposed indicate those adjacent pairs where this relation does not hold. (Broken lines indicate that the percentage stayed the same instead of increasing.) As the authors themselves remark (p.349), it is difficult to come to absolute conclusions from this restricted number of QUE deletions. But in most instances the data fitted or came very closely to fitting with the number of deletions they had predicted (p.349).

G. Sankoff (to appear:33) presents the same data broken down differently. The total percentage of QUE deletions by the sixteen informants for each of the nine environments is given:

(17) a) [+sib] ___ [+sib] : 70%

b) $\begin{bmatrix}+\text{cns}\\-\text{sib}\end{bmatrix}$ ___ [+sib] : 67%

c) [-cns] ___ [+sib] : 23%

d) [+sib] ___ $\begin{bmatrix}+\text{cns}\\-\text{sib}\end{bmatrix}$: 8%

e) $\begin{bmatrix}+\text{cns}\\-\text{sib}\end{bmatrix}$ ___ $\begin{bmatrix}+\text{cns}\\-\text{sib}\end{bmatrix}$: 25%

f) [-cns] ___ $\begin{bmatrix}+\text{cns}\\-\text{sib}\end{bmatrix}$: 15%

g) [+sib] ___ [-cns] : 13%

h) $\begin{bmatrix}+\text{cns}\\-\text{sib}\end{bmatrix}$ ___ [-cns] : 0%

i) [-cns] ___ [-cns] : 2%

When the environments as a whole are compared with each other it is difficult to see what unified phonological motivation could be at work here. We might presume that what is being deleted is /k/, the reduced form of /kə/. As we recall, /kə/ is necessarily reduced to /k/ before a vowel (rule 6 above), and often before a consonant as well. There would indeed be a phonetic motivation for deleting /k/ before a consonant, and particularly between consonants (12 above). But why does the environment (d) provoke such a small percentage of QUE deletions, compared with the other C___C environments? Why does environment (d) provoke deletion less often than three of the five environments which include a vowel on the left or right?

We might hypothesize that the (obligatory) rule (6) has not yet operated when (16) operates, and thus that the QUE deletions before vowels represent an alternative to QUE reduction in this environment, as Bickerton's (1973:39) rules imply. If this is true, the phonological accounts in Cedergren and D. Sankoff (1974) and in G. Sankoff (to appear) collapse two separate processes, motivated differently. But it is difficult to see a phonological motivation in QUE's deleting rather than reducing before vowels. The former process often creates hiatus. One reason for this is that certain common verb forms which take the QUE complementizer end phonetically in vowels: e.g.:

(18) Jean $\left\{\begin{matrix}\text{dit } [d^z\ \underline{i}] \\ \text{croit } [\text{krwa}\underline{\ }]\end{matrix}\right\}$ Ø il va y aller.

(19) Jean veut [vø] Ø elle fasse ça.

Another doubt about the explanatory nature of the phonological analysis just reviewed arises from the relation between [+sib] and

$\begin{bmatrix}+\text{cns}\\-\text{sib}\end{bmatrix}$ in rule (16). What phonetic reason could there be for environments including sibilants to cause QUE deletion systematically more than environments composed of any other consonants? Could it be that certain morphemes or classes or morphemes which happen to end or begin with sibilants provoke the greatest proportion of QUE deletions?

Given the complexity and counter-intuitiveness of the phonological account, can QUE deletion be described in simple and plausible syntactic terms?[5]

III. QUE → Ø / ___ pronouns:

One entire interview in the Sankoff-Cedergren corpus of Montreal French has been studied for QUE deletions. Of a total of 56 such deletions, 54 occurred before pronouns. More particularly, 45 occurred before je or CE, the pronoun which takes the form c' [s], ce [sə] or disjunctive ça [sa]:

(20) avant Ø je la connaisse

(21) Je trouve Ø c'est pas bon.

Puis qu'est-ce Ø ça va donner, ça?

In earlier analyses, the pronoun tu [t^sy] also had been regarded as beginning with a sibilant. Thus the high relative frequency of je, CE, and tu after QUE in these interviews explains why the environment ___# [+sib] had had such great importance in these phonological analyses.

QUE deletion had been found to occur before vowels as well because the pronouns on, il, ils, elle, eux begin with vowels (elles does not occur in popular Montreal French); e.g.:

(22) Fait Ø ils disent c'est correct.

(23) Il disait Ø Ø fallait aller à la confesse.
il

(Il deletion will be discussed below.)

In looking for a reason why QUE should delete before pronouns, one might hypothesize that the deletion started historically before the clitic pronouns $\begin{Bmatrix} ce \\ c' \end{Bmatrix}$, $\begin{Bmatrix} je \\ j' \end{Bmatrix}$, $\begin{Bmatrix} tu \\ [t] \end{Bmatrix}$, $\begin{Bmatrix} il \\ [i] \end{Bmatrix}$, $\begin{Bmatrix} elle \\ [æ] \end{Bmatrix}$, on, vous, $\begin{Bmatrix} [iz] \\ [i] \end{Bmatrix}$. QUE itself behaves as a clitic in reducing before vowels[6] (rule 6 above). Thus QUE deletion could have started as a dissimilatory change. In the two cases in the transcript examined where the environment following deleted QUE was not a pronoun, it was, nevertheless, a clitic, the definite article:

(24) Ils ont donné mon nom pour me vendre des volumes sur la liberté...comment est-ce Ø les révolutions arrivent...

(25) C'est bien beau à apprendre qu'est-ce que c'est Ø la liberté.

(25) is difficult to compare with other examples of QUE deletion. In this use of the qu'est-ce que c'est que construction, which we might call "definitional", the last QUE is deletable in Standard French before pause + ART. The type of QUE deletion we are dealing with is non-Standard. It is interesting that the one clearly exceptional QUE deletion in the interview examined (24) was nevertheless before an article, and thus before a clitic.

IV. QUE deletion is ordered among syntactic rules:

One phonological rule which we have discussed here is common to all dialects of French. This is QUE reduction before vowels (rule 6

above). If rule (6) preceded QUE deletion, that would suggest that the latter is a phonological rule after all. But it is possible to show that rule (6) follows QUE deletion.

If rule 6 operated before QUE deletion, that would mean that the QUE deletion rule deleted lone /k/'s as well as /kə/ sequences. The [k]'s that are created by rule (6), such as in (26), have no phonological motivation for deleting:

(26) J'espère qu'il va venir.
[k]

Again QUE (and /K/) deletion would be a phonological rule if it followed QUE reduction (rule 6). With this ordering /kə/, /k/ deletion would be unmotivated in an important class of its environments. This problem, as well as the necessity of allowing the rule to apply to /k/ as well as /kə/, is avoided if (variable) QUE deletion precedes (obligatory) QUE reduction.

Some support for this proposed ordering of QUE deletion before QUE reduction is provided by a variable rule in a related dialect. In Missouri French (now a moribund dialect for which we have texts dating from the 1930's - Carrière 1937), qui reduces in the same environment as QUE (rule 6), but variably. In spite of this variable-obligatory difference between these two processes, it seems clear that we should unite them in one rule for Missouri French[7]. The motivation is the avoidance of hiatus in both QUE and qui reduction, and the environment is the same:

$$(27)\quad \left.\begin{matrix}\text{que}\\ \text{qui}\end{matrix}\right\} \rightarrow [k] \;/__\#V$$

In the Missouri dialect, variable QUE deletion also takes place: J'ai découvert quocé Ø c'était (Carrière 1937:61). If $\left\{\begin{matrix}que\\qui\end{matrix}\right\}$ reduction (27) were ordered before QUE deletion in this dialect, the latter would delete some /k/'s derived from qui as well as some /k/'s derived from QUE. This is because the difference between qui and QUE would have been neutralized by rule (27). But, in fact, while the deletion of QUE is extremely frequent in this dialect, [k] from qui never deletes:

(28) C'est Joueur de Palets qu'est resté (Carrière 1937:60).
qui

i'nn'a eune vache qu'a trouvé... (p.36)
qui

aigle qu'avait des p'tsits...ein serpent qu'était après
qui qui

les manger (p.55)

Thus in Missouri French QUE deletion must be ordered before $\left\{\begin{matrix}que\\qui\end{matrix}\right\}$ reduction because it distinguishes between original QUE's and original qui's. This gives us one more reason to suspect that QUE deletion is ordered before QUE reduction in Montreal French. It is now crucial to show that QUE deletion precedes a syntactic rule if we are to argue on the basis of order that the former is syntactic[8].

The crucial syntactic rule seems to be impersonal il deletion before falloir, a variable rule which figures in the informal style of many French dialects[9]. To repeat a now familiar example:

(29) Il disait Ø Ø fallait aller à la confesse.
QUE il

This example is crucial because we see that QUE deletion must precede il deletion. Otherwise the /___ pronoun environment would have been lost at the time of QUE deletion, and we would have to accept this as a unique case of QUE deletion before a verb. The ordering of the three rules which we have discussed is, then, for Montreal French:

1. QUE → Ø / ___pronouns (variable)
2. il → Ø / ___FAL'OIR (variable)
3. QUE → [k] / ___#V (obligatory).

V. Evidence from related dialects:

I have found data on variable QUE deletion in three popular French dialects apart from Montreal French. The first of these seems to be the most distantly related: a Walloon dialect (Remacle 1960: 138-42). The investigator's transcriptions suggest a dialect phonologically remote from Montreal French. The examples of QUE deletion were also translated literally into Standard French. The following are typical:

(30) a) Il faut Ø j'y aille

b) C'est ce qu'il faudrait Ø les gens feraient

c) Il faut Ø Ø y en ait
que il

d) Il faudrait Ø Ø remettraient leurs pièces à neuf
que ils

e) Ø faudrait déjà Ø Ø ferait froid
que il

f) Elle se levait toujours, vous savez! avant Ø le diable n'eût mis son bonnet

g) Avant Ø vous ne soyez là

h) Nous travaillerons tant Ø nous pourrons

i) Il faut qu'on nettoie les myrtilles tant Ø elles ne sont pas humides

Remacle regards the most basic condition of QUE deletion in this dialect as phonetic. He notes that QUE plus the following vowel, typically that of il(s) or elle(s), are usually deleted together /V#___C. This appears to be obligatory where il(s) follows QUE. Thus, in this dialect, speakers choose between

(31) i fãt vẽgne

and

(32) i fãt k'i vẽgne

'Il faut qu'il vienne.'

That is, [k] from QUE stays if [i] from /il(s)/ stays. It is easy to show that this condition does not hold in Montreal French. (Cf., e.g., sentence (23) above from the Sankoff-Cedergren corpus.)

As the examples (30) show, the vast majority of QUE deletions in this dialect appear to be before pronouns. In the two exceptional examples given, (b) and (f), the environment was /___def. art. (a clitic) as in the Montreal French corpus studied. But we do not have enough data to be sure that the proportion of pronouns before which QUE is deleted is higher than the overall proportion of pronouns following deletable QUE in this dialect.

The second dialect or dialect group for which we have examples of QUE deletion is the popular European French described by Bauche (1928; 1951) and Frei (1929). The following examples are those given

by Frei and Bauche:

(33) Tu veux Ø je vienne? (Frei 1929:123, citing Bauche, 1928:142)

Il a dit Ø il viendrait. (Ibid.)

Faut Ø je m'en alle? (Ibid.)

Je veux pas Ø tous ces types i soyent toujours à me courir (Ibid.)

Il nous a dit Ø comme blessure il avait reçu une balle dans le dos... (Frei:123)

Qu'est-ce que c'est Ø vous voulez? (Bauche 1951:95)

Quoi c'est Ø nous ferons? (p.95)

Tu hécrira si tu veux au depot pour Ø il manvoi un paquet de fait [d'effets] de soldat. (Frei 1929:123, citing Prein 1921:76).

Here again it is difficult to judge whether a greater proportion of QUE's are deleted /___pronouns than elsewhere. The predominance of pronouns in their examples may only be proportionate to their frequency as the environment following deletable QUE. This frequency must be high in informal French, judging from the Sankoff-Cedergren corpus. But no plausible phonological motivation emerges from the Bauche-Frei examples, such as, say, avoidance of three-consonant clusters.

The third dialect for which we have QUE-deletion data is more directly related to Montreal French than the others. This dialect is Missouri French (see Section IV above). In this case the documentation of QUE deletion is more than adequate. It occurs repeatedly on every page of Carrière's (1937) folk-tale collection. A comparison with the Sankoff-Cedergren corpus suggests that the

process is much more general in this dialect than in Montreal French. There are no apparent phonological or syntactic environments which condition it:

(34) Vous m'a délivrée, i' faudra Ø vous m'marisse (Carrière 1937:56)

Ça s'fait Ø 'l (il) a coupé la langue (p.56)

Quocé Ø c'était son troub' (p.58)

Ça s'fait Ø l' (le) rouè 'l est partsi (p.60)

I' connaissait Ø Tord-Chêne 'l aurait marié... (p.59)

la sorte d'homme Ø on avait besoin (p.60)

(QUE replaces dont in Missouri French)

la sorte d'homme Ø j'voulais (p.60) (je)

Quand l'vieux Cantoufe 'l est eurvenu, i'a vu Ø ane d'ses p'tsits garçons i' manquait (p.25)

Dzis-moin quocé dans l'monde Ø tsu fais icitte, touè? (p.22)

C'est bon d'vous dzire Ø eune fouès c'étaient ein vieux pis eune vieille (p.23)

C'est dommage Ø nos filles ont pas eune maisonne en queuque part dans l'bois (p.23)

There is only one type of constraint which we know to be shared by three out of four of the dialects discussed here. In Montreal French, the Walloon dialect described by Remacle, and Missouri French, there is evidence that certain conjunctions cannot lose QUE: e.g. Montreal French: après que, avant que, pour que, sans que; the

Walloon dialect: après que, bien que, malgré que; Missouri French: parce que. Thus the type of constraint that we find to be shared by the dialects for which we have the appropriate information is lexical, rather than phonological or syntactic.

Thus the data from other dialects offers no conclusive support either for the phonological or for the syntactic account of QUE deletion in Montreal French. In the absence of clear external evidence, the internal evidence presented in Sections I-IV suggests that QUE deletion in Montreal French is a syntactic rule.

Footnotes

[1] This article is a total revision of L'effacement du que - règle syntaxique, a paper presented at the 1974 meeting of the Canadian Linguistic Association which is to appear in Recherches linguistiques à Montréal 4.

[2] My thanks to Gillian Sankoff for helping me to use this corpus.

[3] G. Sankoff (1973), however, proposes a rule of QUE attachment to account for the non-Standard QUE of interrogative conjunctions (e.g., comment que, quand que). The problem is not discussed in this article because the absence of QUE from these conjunctions is Standard and behaves quite differently from non-Standard QUE deletion. Sankoff discusses the pro's and con's of such an attachment rule in that article.

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[5] There are two other things about a phonological account of QUE deletion which render it suspect. First, such a rule applies to only one morpheme. Second, such a rule deletes two segments at once (P. Pupier and B. Tranel, personal communication). I know of one counterexample to these two objections, found in Aronoff (1974:206), citing an example from Kiparsky: A rule in German deletes (only) the morpheme ge-. The only condition is phonological: /___syllable [-stress]. Thus it is a phonological rule, and the

above objections are therefore weakened.

[6] Y.-C. Morin and P. Pupier, personal communication.

[7] For an example of a rule which must apply categorically to one type of input and variably to another type, see Reighard (1974).

[8] Bresnan (1971) argues that stress in English is determined at the level of deep (syntactic) structure: It appears that the stress contours of English sentences are determined... by their underlying syntactic structures. Further, because prosodic stress rules like the NSR require prior assignment of word stress, the latter must occur either on deep structure or in the lexicon (p.269).

If this claim is correct, it does not appear to affect the traditional hypothesis that syntactic rules in general are ordered before phonological rules in general. Bresnan (1972:333), in fact, proposes the following rule ordering for "any given transformational domain": 1. word-stress; 2. transformations; 3. prosodic rules ("rules of intonation and contraction", p.327). In these terms, I am claiming that QUE deletion is a transformation and that QUE reduction is a prosodic rule.

[9] Variable il deletion may well be more general than is suggested here. Note the Walloon dialect examples where il is deleted (below).

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